

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #21C – Dra Kyam (alias)
August 3, 2014**

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[Anonymity Requested]

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #21C
2. Interviewee: Dra Kyam (alias)
3. Age: 44
4. Date of Birth: 1969
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet:
9. Date of Interview: August 3, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Tibetan Association of Santa Fe Community Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 27 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tashi Juchungtsan
14. Videographer: Tomas Haywood
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dra Kyam was born into a small farming family in Utsang Province. His father had formerly been a monk who was forced, as most monks were, by the Chinese to leave his monastery. Dra Kyam was the youngest of three children and attended his village school. His father tried to instill Buddhist values into his children without being able to practice Buddhism formally. Later Dra Kyam was enrolled in a monastery and learned to make *thangka* 'traditional Tibetan Buddhist paintings' from a master in Kham.

Dra Kyam explains how during the Cultural Revolution there was widespread destruction of monasteries and desecration of statues and *thangka*. He expresses sadness that the remnants of very old paintings are not being properly restored and instead are destroyed and replaced by new artwork. He also expresses disappointment that the art of *thangka* painting is not being preserved in its true traditional format and many "fake" versions are now being created by amateurs.

Dra Kyam shares great detail of the art of *thangka* painting. He describes his own experience from learning to draw to the intricate method of mixing colors and creating different shades. He shares his experience of studying and working in Italy and the United States to gain more knowledge about art in general and learn how to perform restorations on paintings.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, monastic life, Cultural Revolution, destruction of monasteries, customs/traditions.

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Interview #21C

Interviewee: Dra Kyam [alias]

Age: 44, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: August 3, 2014

[Interviewee speaks in English for the majority of the interview.]

Question: Please tell me your name.

00:00:07

Interviewee #21C: My name is Dra Kyam.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#21C: Yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know.

#21C: Okay.

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, please let me know.

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#21C: Yes.

Q: So what we will do is that we will give you a pseudonym to protect your identity.

#21C: Okay.

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#21C: Okay.

Q: Let us begin by your telling me where, what year you were born in Tibet? What was the province?

00:01:34

#21C: Utsang.

Q: In Utsang? And how many people were in your family?

#21C: Five of us.

Q: Five? Who were they? Mother...?

#21C: My parents and brother and sister.

Q: ...and brother and sister...

#21C: ...and myself.

Q: Where were you in the lineup of siblings? Which one?

#21C: Oh, I am the youngest.

Q: You were the youngest?

#21C: Yes.

Q: You had an older brother...

#21C: ...and older sister.

Q: ...and an older sister. I see. Okay, and what did your family do for a living?

#21C: Farmer.

Q: They were farmers?

#21C: Yes.

Q: How was it? A small farm or large?

00:02:15

#21C: Small.

Q: Small farm?

#21C: Yeah. You know, after the Cultural Revolution, they [the Chinese] divided all farmers, every family, you know, each people get very small, not very big.

Q: After the Revolution, the Chinese invasion...

#21C: Yeah.

Q: ...everybody got a little piece.

#21C: Yes.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Redistributed.

Q: Redistributed land. I see. Did you go to school or were you only a farmer's child?

#21C: I went to school in the village school, and my father doesn't trust Chinese school and then he didn't send me to school [outside the village]. And I waited in my village school. He didn't leave me in home; he sent me to [village] school. I'm not...there are no students because I already graduated my, I think it's kindergarten or we call the village school.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: K.G., kindergarten.

Q: Kindergarten.

00:03:15

#21C: Yes, that teacher is from [my] village [who] he [father] knows well. My father was a monk and he doesn't trust Chinese school. That's why he didn't send me to school [outside the village]. That time not that good idea, I think. They should send us to school but he didn't send. And then he sent me to the monastery but my brother [and] sister didn't get chance to go to school. Because my brother [he] also did send [to] village school and my father doesn't want to send him to bigger school mostly like Chinese, you know. And then he escaped. He went to other middle school. Later he didn't send...continue to high school and college. He [was] sent to my uncle's to study carpentry.

Q: Carpentry?

#21C: Yeah.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He means to say like in the village the teacher was from their own village. So his father trusted them. After the K.G. they were not sent to the Chinese school because he do not trust the Chinese school.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about what happened to your father and why he was no longer a monk?

#21C: After Cultural Revolution no one can stay being a monk.

Q: How long had he been a monk at that point?

#21C: I'm not really sure exactly, but I think 10 or 15 years he stayed in the monastery and then he had to give up; monks have to give up.

Q: Did he...was he just forced to leave? Was he put in jail or did anything happen to him?

#21C: No jail.

Q: No jail?

#21C: No jail, yeah.

Q: He just left because...?

00:05:21

#21C: He just left and then when you get in the village you cannot stay with robes and you cannot stay single. You have to [get] married. I heard about that.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: All the monasteries are closed.

#21C: I heard about that from my teacher and from my father. I wasn't there that time.

Q: You heard about...the monasteries were closed...

#21C: Yeah.

Q: ...and your father had to leave and you couldn't wear robes in the village.

#21C: Yeah. When I was a kid, you know my monastery has a big statue. They [Chinese] destroyed most [of the] precious statues, all, everything. And they used [the] building for the granary. You know, at that time all farmers make together... [Asks interpreter in Tibetan] What is it called when everybody gathers and works together?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: All the farmers work together collectively.

#21C: And then you have to take all products to the storage. That storage is in the... granary is in the monastery.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: This is just a suggestion to the interpreter. When you speak up say it loudly because you don't have a mike on and I want to make sure you're recording it. Maybe you want to move a little closer. That'll be good. So it's not background if you're helping. That's very good.

Q: Did you see any of the monasteries or any of the statues being destroyed?

#21C: Yes, that's [what] I'm going to tell.

Q: Tell me.

00:07:05

#21C: Um, yeah. Then they [Tibetan farmers] took product to the granary and that's in my monastery. And then when my father took me there, they [Chinese] didn't clean up and a big statue [of] Sakyamuni is open, the stomach. All materials are mixed into the barley and wheat and everywhere. My father was very sad.

I'm just a kid, you know. I don't know much but still it's a strange feeling. I still remember that when I opened that temple, one big statue, we have that. Statue is, I think, three-stories statue. They thought in the stomach there's precious stone. That's why they opened all. All you know, we consecrate the statues. There are most mantras, rolling on the paper. That's all come out everywhere.

Q: What's inside the statue?

#21C: There are mantras, mostly.

Q: The mantras.

#21C: Rolling, print mantra on the paper and roll and then that's [what] we consecrate.

Q: Yes.

00:08:12

#21C: Then that's all come out. I don't know much but still feeling...I still remember. My father, he was a monk then; he's really respect[ed]. He's, how to say...[not discernible]. I still can feel that. After that many years [later] I enter a monastery and we did restoration.

Q: And you did restoration later. Good, we'll hear about that. But the image of the broken statue of the Buddha...

#21C: Yeah, Buddha's center is all...face is fine, all stomach...sort of...

Q: What was the statue made of?

#21C: Clay.

Q: Clay.

#21C: And around that are eight Bodhisattvas, some of them missing arms, looking so...[not discernible].

Q: You were very sad.

#21C: Some of them head off, some of them no arms, some of their fingers broken. They didn't destroy completely.

Q: But they desecrated.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: It was a lot of destruction and desecration, making it...trying to make it very unholy.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Was this a large monastery? About how...

#21C: Pretty big monastery.

Q: Pretty big. About how many monks would have lived in that monastery?

00:09:34

#21C: Before Chinese come I heard...they said we had 350.

Q: Three hundred...?

#21C: Three-hundred fifty.

Q: Three-hundred fifty monks in that...

#21C: Monks.

Q: ...in that monastery. What about a...So there was a lot of destruction of the statues. What about *thangka* 'traditional Tibetan Buddhist painting' paintings? Were there any destroyed or defaced?

#21C: When I enter that time, that temple no *thangka* painting, all gone. That was maybe way later, you know. I was maybe 6, 7 years old.

Q: When you saw this?

#21C: Yeah, when I saw this. And also mural paintings are damaged. You know, some with water leaking and some of them people throw rocks and a lot of damage. And some of them they cover with newspaper.

Q: Covered with newspaper?

#21C: Yeah, and...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Glass are broken.

Q: Because the glass was broken?

00:10:42

#21C: Yeah. Some rooms they use for the calves—what to say—barn or you know, there are cows and donkeys, and then you can see the—what to say—cow dung also on the mural painting.

Q: Oh, very, very sad destruction.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: And defacing.

#21C: Yeah. Also this is later, you know way later when I was...I remember those things.

Q: Yes.

#21C: That time it is much worse, I think.

Q: At that time it was...

#21C: ...when they are destroying. That time it is much worse but...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: During the Revolution it was worse than what he has seen. He's seen these years and years after. And he says like when he remembers all the *thangka* paintings were already removed and gone, disappeared.

Q: So we...Just to clarify, you're 44 years old now. So if you were born in like 1969 and about how old were you when you saw that?

#21C: I think 6 or 7.

Q: Six or 7, okay. So that would've been '76, about 1976.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: And you're right. The Cultural Revolution was starting in the late, in the 50's and then after that. So yeah, that was a good twenty something...

00:12:22

#21C: And also one interesting thing is, you know, all, some kids when we're [in] school, some kids bringing statues, all those *vajra* 'spiritual thunderbolt' bells just [as though they were] toys. I got one nice small Tara [statue of female deity]. I don't know; that time I don't know any Buddhism. They [Chinese] are destroying; you cannot talk loudly of those things.

My friends brought, a schoolmate, a kid brought a nice and green Tara. I still have it in my...with me. He said...it's interesting, I don't know who the statue is but that guy, the boy said, "I want to exchange this with a bottle of ink." He's looking [for] ink. I don't

[know] if this is my karma or...I'm so interested in it. I had also... I'm so lucky; I had one bottle of ink that I traded. I still have that. I still remember that. There's a little damage on top, crown part little damage but still very good.

And then one day my father asked uncle to...they took also mantra out or something...and then my father asked my uncle to do consecrate again. That statue was very old. Last time one Swiss...[To interpreter in Tibetan] What do you call someone that researches antiques? There are people that research the age of antiques.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: People who do like research on antique and give the dating, dating carbon.

Q: Dating carbon, something like that.

#21C: Yeah. He said this is very old, the statue.

Q: What was it made of?

#21C: [To interpreter in Tibetan] What's *zikyim* called?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It's mixed bronze, copper and some other.

#21C: They said this is five jewels mixed. Then they made. That's sort of...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Five different metals.

Q: Five metals.

#21C: Five metals, yeah.

Q: How old was it when they dated the statue? How old?

00:14:26

#21C: He said 6-700 years old, the statue.

Q: Wow!

#21C: And then my uncle, he wanted to keep it and I said, "No, this is...I got it. I'll keep this."

[Interpreter to interviewer]: "This is my ink bottle."

Q: "This is my ink bottle trade, my very good trade." This was your karma.

#21C: There's, you know, when I was a kid, also when we do the *jensay*, fire Pooja, there's some tool...Hhow do you say—a hole and...

[Interpreter to interviewee]: They pour the oil down...

#21C: I still remember I play with that [religious instrument]. You know, put mud and water. I put string and drag. We don't have any toys. I used those [as] toys. In this day if we have that [it's] very expensive [laughs], that time just [used as a] toy.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: What he means to say is like, you know during that, after the Cultural Revolution, so all the religious objects and all those things were never respected. So you know, religion is almost like a no movements there. So children started using these religious objects as toys to play.

Q: You know, when you said your father had been a monk for maybe 15 years and he certainly didn't trust the Communists, the Chinese schools but did he...was he able to tell you anything about Buddhism, about the dharma?

00:15:56

#21C: I don't remember when I was a kid. I see what he's doing, I remember.

Q: What was he doing?

#21C: Like, you know, in other kids, you know, they [Chinese] destroy our outer form like but they cannot change the mind. And he's [father] really in the deep practice. That's why...lot of other kids they kill animals. You know slingshots? They kill birds. I cannot do that at all because I don't know any Buddhism that [time], non-virtuous, at all but my father's...how do you call?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Very strict?

#21C: Yeah, and in my life I remember I only shot one bird. That's all. Some of my friends like shooting, you know, in the summer there's a...on the farm there are birds [causing] damage. I cannot do that. Now I know why I didn't kill much animals because of my father.

Q: His influence.

#21C: Yes, his influence.

Q: So it was...

#21C: He cannot talk because if he tells that he has to go to jail. He cannot tell.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He will be accused [of] preaching Buddhism.

Q: Right. So by his behavior...

#21C: Yeah.

Q: ...and his example. He said...

00:17:15

#21C: He didn't explain but he just—how to say—[speaks in Tibetan] put the fear.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Scared him, you know, not to kill and all those things.

Q: He said, "Don't kill. Don't hurt. Don't harm." He didn't say why.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: He was teaching you that but it...it influenced you a great deal. I see.

#21C: I know he sort of regretted he gave up [being a] monk. You know, that's why he really wants to send the children to monastery.

Q: He wanted you to have values.

#21C: Yes.

Q: To instill the values of what he learned.

#21C: Also I remember that when I was young he said he gave up everything. He wants to go like Milarepa 'great saint of Tibet, born 1052 A.D.' I don't know [if] he can be like that. Also he wants to go, just pack and then he want to go everywhere just [speaks in Tibetans] on pilgrimage.

Q: Did he...? Where did he go?

00:18:12

#21C: Then my mom, and my sister is much older than me, you know my sister. They cry; they couldn't let him go. That's so sad.

Q: Oh, you mean not when he was a young man but after he married.

#21C: After he married and after....

Q: And was a father.

#21C: I remember that.

Q: He wanted to go on a pilgrimage.

#21C: Pilgrimage and give up everything; doesn't want to come back. He wants to give whole life to practice. Then my mom and sister cried and they couldn't let him go. I know he is deeply practicing all the time. He never hurt anybody, you know.

Q: So he never went. He never left the family?

#21C: No, then he didn't.

Q: He stayed home to take care.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember how when he wanted to leave, were you...how old were you about?

00:19:06

#21C: I think like 10 or 11.

Q: Ten or 11, yeah, and you were the baby.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: So the children were...

#21C: I'm just watching what they are doing. Now I remember, yeah.

Q: The children were raised and he wanted to follow his heart but to respect your mother's wishes he stayed.

#21C: Yes.

Q: What happened to him?

#21C: Then he passed away when I was 14.

Q: When you were 14?

#21C: I think I...yeah, I went to east Tibet to study *thangka* painting. That is when I was 16. After that I didn't see him. He passed away when...during [the time] I was in east Tibet.

Q: During...?

#21C: When I was in east Tibet...

Q: When you were in east Tibet.

#21C: ...studying *thangka* painting, you know.

Q: I see. Do you know what he...what caused him to pass away?

#21C: I think stomach problem. Yeah, stomach problem. We don't know exactly what stomach problem.

Q: So if we go back we know he didn't want you to go to the Chinese school. So what schooling did you have?

00:20:17

#21C: I only have village schooling.

Q: You only have village [schooling] and that was taught by Tibetan people?

#21C: Yes.

Q: So that was...

#21C: The teacher was [an] ex-monk. That was why my father know him, each other. That's why he trusts him.

Q: Okay, and he felt safe. So like you were in school for how long?

#21C: I entered school I think when I was 7 until I was 14.

Q: Seven to 14 in the village school.

#21C: At 14 I entered the monastery.

Q: And at 14 you entered the monastery?

#21C: Yes.

Q: Okay.

#21C: I'm the first young, the second...first monk after the Cultural Revolution.

Q: Really? From your village or where?

#21C: From my village, yeah. You can tell from my village. One of my friends and me, we were together, [the] first.

Q: Did your father...was he alive when you did that or he had passed away?

00:21:15

#21C: He [was] alive that time.

Q: He was alive.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: What did he think of your wanting to be a monk?

#21C: That's [what] I'm going to tell you. You know, my monastery [was] destroyed completely. You know, and then...

Q: I didn't hear...

#21C: The Cultural Revolution destroyed all temples and then in '82 I think they got permission to rebuild or restoration...restore and then...all damaged, you know. Then my art teacher, he's from east Tibet, pretty far. Then we invite, our monastery invite him to my monastery for the restoration. Then our lama he wants [kids] from our village to study with him. That's why he asked my schoolteacher, "Who is better? We need some...young kids can learn from this master. We need some kids." Because they are monks together before the Chinese destroyed the monastery. And then my teacher points me because when I was...when teacher [is] teaching I'm not pay attention with him. I'm drawing, copying some designs. That's why my teacher knows I'm interested [in] painting...drawing.

Q: Isn't that beautiful!

00:22:44

#21C: And then my, our lama asked my father and [father replied], "Perfect for him. He's waiting for that." [Laughs]

Q: Your father loved that idea.

#21C: Yes.

Q: Was the restoration that they were going to do in your village of the monastery, were the Chinese permitting this or approving of this?

#21C: Restoration?

Q: Yeah.

#21C: Yeah, yeah, they give....

Q: They gave permission.

#21C: They gave permission.

Q: They gave permission. And so they gave permission and so did they send for somebody to come and do it or was somebody in the village who could do it?

#21C: Restoration?

Q: Yeah.

#21C: Yeah. If someone like what I said, a painter; we don't have any painter in my village. That's why we have to invite my teacher from all the way east Tibet.

Q: Okay. That was before he was your teacher.

#21C: Yes.

Q: They send for this special person.

#21C: Right.

Q: Are you able to give me his name...of this teacher?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: What is his name?

00:23:55

#21C: Lama Tsakyab.

Q: How do you spell that?

#21C: T-S-A-K-Y-A-B, I think.

Q: Tsakyab, okay. Lama Tsakyab. T-S-A-K-Y-A-P.

#21C: Yes.

Q: And so they send for him from Kham.

#21C: Yes, they invite him. My monastery invited him to come to restoration and I studied with him. Then when he left after this project and then my monastery send me to east Tibet again to finish, accomplish all my learning [about] painting. That time I lost my father.

Q: Did they send you to go after that teacher and study with him?

#21C: Yes, after teacher left, after one year.

Q: Did you go to a city in Kham?

#21C: No, not a city; it's a country. There's no art school that time. I have to study with his family. Live with him.

Q: Live with his family. I see and when you were sent to study with this master, what did your father think of this?

00:25:24

#21C: It's little hard that time; no one travel that far, that long, you know. I decided, my decision; they never forced me. That time that's pretty far and also that time they're so scared [of] kid sending to east Tibet. That's—how to say—a little bad reputation. [Speaks in Tibetan] Khampa 'people of Kham' are considered scary. [Laughs]

I don't know why. I don't know at all. Anyway... [Laughs]

Q: What was scary about the Khampas?

#21C: Rough and someone's killing. When I go there I still remember. My master prepared a *gawu* 'amulet with image of God within.' *Gawu* is [for] protection. You put something precious and that will protect you. I still have that.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: A talisman.

Q: A talisman.

#21C: Yes.

Q: Protective deity?

#21C: Yeah. Then my sister and my mother, I still remember, when I left they're crying. And my father came to help me and—what to say—take me to find someone [to] go with me. From Lhasa that time it's very bad transportation, you know. There's not much car, very bad road.

Q: Very far away.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: And your age at that point was?

#21C: Sixteen.

Q: You were 16?

#21C: But I was very small.

Q: But you're small.

#21C: [Laughs]

Q: So this is like 1985.

#21C: Yes.

Q: And you're 16.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: A small guy.

#21C: Yeah. [Laughs] Even I cannot make my bed. You know, you have to carry everything with you, you know.

Q: My gosh! Did you find a strong guy from Lhasa to go with you?

00:27:16

#21C: Yes, I found someone. That time very bad transportation. It takes 13 days to get there.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Walk?

#21C: No.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Horse ride?

#21C: You know some roads are very bad. Some certain place you have to walk. Car is just with the luggage.

Q: So 13 days of was it walking and driving?

#21C: To get there, driving. We have car but very bad situation. The road is very bad, you know. When I get there when I [was] thinking of coming back, I couldn't sleep. Road is very bad. Lot of damage [to the] car, you know.

Q: Very, very rugged, very rough and did you have any scary experiences on the way? Any problems?

#21C: Yeah, also that car doesn't have permission to take people. [It's] a truck. Thirty people on the truck, you know. This truck you cannot bring people, you know and then you have to hide during the day and then night you drive.

Q: Right, you had to avoid Chinese soldiers.

00:28:35

#21C: Police, I think.

Q: Police. So you didn't have your own car. You just hitchhiked.

#21C: Not hitchhiked. There's some...

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Pay a small rent.

#21C: Yes, small rent. Some people taking business with that, you know.

Q: Passengers.

#21C: Yeah, passengers [in a] truck. No bus that time.

Q: So it was a total of 13 days for you to get...

#21C: Yeah, until I get there 13 days.

Q: By going on trucks or vehicles or anything like that. Was your companion a monk or was he just a strong protector? Who was the man who went with you?

#21C: One Khampa. Not a monk.

Q: He was a Khampa?

#21C: Yeah. [Laughs]

Q: Good idea. So what happened when you got there?

#21C: I got there safely and I studied and then the problem is I lost my father.

Q: While you were there.

#21C: Yes, when I was there and my parents [mother] sent letter about my father passing away but I got that maybe after a year. Not I, my teacher received it. Then he heard about all the news about my father and teacher didn't give the letter to me because he doesn't want me being sad because my father's passed [away], already passed [away]. [Speaks in Tibetan] [Teacher] believed it meaningless to tell [me]. [He] thought why make [me] sad. He didn't give me the letter.

00:30:11

He didn't give me the letter. I [didn't] find out until I get back home. When I got home I asked everybody there about my father. I asked my mom, "Where's daddy?" Then she started crying.

Q: He was afraid you would be...

#21C: That time there was no phone.

Q: Yeah, you would be so sad. So how many years passed? You were...?

#21C: In east Tibet?

Q: No, when you left at 16 to study with the master. How long were you there?

#21C: I came back when I was 18.

Q: So two years.

#21C: Two years there.

Q: Wow!

#21C: Two and half years.

Q: Two years. So you had no correspondence with your family during those two years?

#21C: No correspondence.

Q: Oh boy! Tell me about your life learning to be a...? Was it a *thangka* painter? What were you learning?

00:31:08

#21C: I enter...When I come back then I learn all monastic thing and then restoration to have in the monastery.

Q: During those two years that's what...

#21C: No, no. During two years is just every day memorizing [for] monastic examination. The first one is 108 pages. First you have to memorize. Morning and evening I did that and during the day, every day drawing.

Q: Really?

#21C: No weekend, only two days off in summer and three days off in the New Year. That's all.

Q: So memorizing morning and night and then in the afternoons drawing.

#21C: Yes.

Q: What were you drawing or painting?

#21C: I was painting like deities.

Q: Deities.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell us about that like what kind of paints did you use? How did your teacher show you? Can you give us a description of these art classes?

00:32:12

#21C: Yes. First one, we learn drawing with a stick and blackboard. And then with that [for] years only stick on the board. You know, chalk and blackboard.

Q: It would be like a charcoal stick.

#21C: Yeah, charcoal stick. [In Tibetan] It's not charcoal stick.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, actually they make like a board. They put like some kind of grease...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...and then you put ash or any white powder.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Got it.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: So then you draw on that.

Q: Then you draw on that substance.

#21C: That's one year.

Q: Wow!

#21C: Whole day after breakfast until dinner.

Q: Wow!

#21C: [For] one year I did that and then the next year I did with a brush, [which] you can use on the paper. Because after you can learn how to use the brush with ink and paper, and then gradually if you are good with those two and then teacher ask you [to] help his painting *thangka*. First it's painting sceneries and then more and more come closer [to] details.

Q: Maybe, I know you have a *thangka* painting with you. Could you show us like what you would learn how to paint first? On this *thangka* what would you learn first?

[Camera moves over a painting of Buddha]

00:33:46

#21C: First we do more sceneries, sky and earth, and then cloud and then bigger cloud. Then later, later [after] covering months then comes details, more and then body and clothes, and then latest is opening the eye. Then those all done, then you can paint yourself.

Q: The first thing you're doing is drawing.

#21C: Drawing, drawing, yeah.

Q: And when you do the drawing of a *thangka* painting like this one, what are you drawing with? With a pen, a pencil?

#21C: Pencil, yeah.

Q: A pencil.

#21C: Pencil, and we use also charcoal.

Q: Charcoal.

#21C: Charcoal stick. We make our own charcoal.

Q: So you'd start out with clouds and flowers and simple things, right?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: And then you're allowed to do your first one. What kind of paint are you using or is it ink?

#21C: Mostly ink, all pigment. Mostly rock painting; we call it *dhotson* 'stone color.' I don't know how to use this here. Pigment or...

Q: Pigment, ground...

00:34:58

#21C: Stone color, we say. In Tibetan it's called stone color. I think you use it here.

Q: Stone color.

#21C: Ground.

Q: You grind it?

#21C: Grind stones, yes. And also when you're doing the drawing on the board you have to help how to stretch the canvas.

Q: Yes.

#21C: Have to teach, you know, that you have to learn during your drawing on the board.

Q: If we look at the colors on this beautiful *thangka* that you're working on...are you still working on this or is it finished?

#21C: This is finished.

Q: It's beautiful. What are some of the pigments? Where do they come from? Like where does the blue-sky pigment come from?

#21C: This is a...most paint I bought from here. Here special...

Q: You bought here?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Okay, in the States.

#21C: Yeah. That's called the...[not discernible]. Imported from Germany, I think all those pigments.

Q: They're all pigments?

#21C: Yeah, all pigments.

Q: And you mix them with...

#21C: Mix them with...in Tibet we use yak skin glue.

Q: Oh, really!

00:36:05

#21C: Here I use rabbit hair glue.

Q: You mix some with glue.

#21C: Yes.

Q: Yak skin glue. How do they get the glue from the yak skin?

#21C: [Laughs]

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They will boil it and like jelly.

Q: In case we want the recipe, you have to have a yak. You have to obviously kill the yak, I assume, an old yak. An old yak, seriously and then you boil. People will not know this in the future.

#21C: Yeah, yeah, boil and turn like jelly.

Q: Yes.

#21C: That's the glue. Take out all oil out.

Q: Okay.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Take the grease and everything out. Boil it for a long time and it turns into like a jelly.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Jelly.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Then let it dry and then you can use it anytime you need.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Really? And it's sort of sticky and solid.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Um...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Like a lard or something like that. Does it become dry?

#21C: Yes. Once dry you can cut like small pieces. Dry and soft dry. Then you freeze it.

Q: Freeze dried.

#21C: Freeze dried. Thank you.

Q: It can dry and then how do you make it moist again? What do you add?

00:37:24

#21C: Water.

Q: You add water.

#21C: Soak for one night.

Q: Hot water?

#21C: Yeah, whole night and tomorrow it turns...

Q: This is important recipe; I could use it some day. So hot water and it'll loosen it and then you add pigment to it.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Can you name some of the colors that are your favorite colors that you use in *thangka* paintings?

#21C: Rum, we call the indigo.

Q: Indigo.

#21C: Yeah, I like that.

Q: Indigo is beautiful. What else?

#21C: Pang is green.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Pang* actually means the lawn.

Q: The lawn. Where do you get the green from? How is it made, that pigment?

#21C: Turquoise sometimes. [In Tibetan] I do not know what a certain green is called.

Q: Green turquoise. So it's ground stone. It's ground stone and...

#21: The white is called *nyimakhachu* or something. White, they call the *nyimakhachu*. That you have to heat it up, burn it and then take it out and ground. So, very good white.

Q: Is it actually stone?

#21C: It's stone. It's a square-shaped stone.

Q: It's a white stone. Interesting. You grind it. It's very opaque.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: I imagine. It's a beautiful white. Do you use that to soften the colors then? Like you've indigo dark.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Then you add white it makes it softer, more subtle?

00:39:12

#21C: Yeah, five basic colors and then all made different with that white. Indigo is [for] making line, final.

Q: Line?

#21C: Line.

Q: Oh, you make drawing lines?

#21C: Like here modern art is...detail brings with the shading, you know. In Tibetan art final bring with line. That's why color has the different line, a different color line.

Q: Different color line. Can you show us here?

#21C: Like this [points to lining of Buddha's robes on *thangka*] is maroon, red and orange. The line is maroon. Like blue [points to body of image] is lined with indigo.

Q: Oh, I see, yes with indigo. Is that the white, the flowers? Is that the white stone, ground stone?

#21C: Yes. [Points to flowers on *thangka*]

Q: Yes. So you said like...tell us there are five, you said there are five basic colors. Can you show us on here the five basics? Which ones?

#21C: White...

Q: The white one we have.

#21C: Yellow...

Q: Yeah.

#21C: Red and green.

Q: And green...

#21C: And blue.

Q: And blue. Where do you get the red from?

00:40:38

#21C: [Speaks in Tibetan] What is *gyaltsen* called? From...

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It's also kind of like stone, red stone.

Q: It's a stone?

#21C: Red stone.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I don't know what you call it in English. It's also used for medicinal purpose.

#21C: We use it when people break an arm or something.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: For the bone fractures.

Q: Oh, it fixes the bone? It heals the bone?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: So we know the white is a stone. The yellow is also a stone?

#21C: Yellow is also a stone.

Q: These are all stones and they're ground. And the green is a stone, like turquoise you said?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: And the blue is indigo.

#21C: [For] indigo also we use lapis lazuli. There's some other similar...

Q: Lapis? Like lapis...?

#21C: Lapis lazuli, yeah.

Q: Lazuli. Yes, it's a beautiful color. Lapis lazuli, beautiful...beautiful color, so good. So then I see you have the basic colors and then also you have to outline them.

#21C: Yeah. Basic colors and all those...each basic color make lighter [into] five different kinds.

Q: Five different...

#21C: Yeah.

Q: ...shades.

#21C: Shades, not really limit number, you know all different kinds.

Q: And then combination of those five colors, would you say you only used five colors in this?

#21C: This is pretty simple. I don't know exactly five [colors] or not. Most all of them are here.

Q: Most all of them are there. The pink looks unusual. How would you...?

00:42:12

#21C: Yeah, that's [points to pink portion on *thangka*] unusual. [For] this I used a different color.

Q: That's not typical. I don't recognize this one.

#21C: Yes, this is... My friend, he wants this color. In Tibet, I don't know why they don't like this [points to pink] color much.

Q: Is that right? It's like magenta.

#21C: Not everybody but some [of] my older teachers they don't like this color; I still remember.

Q: Is that right?

#21C: [Speaks in Tibetan] They didn't like it at all.

Q: What color, what would you call that color in English?

#21C: I don't know how do you call in English. Pink?

Q: Pink?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Like a pink, cerise. Gets a little...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That's a female color.

Q: It's a female color.

#21C: [Laughs] I don't know.

Q: In this country too pink is considered a color for little girls. Yes. So they don't like it. So that's really interesting. What is the hardest part to paint do you think in that *thangka*? What would you...tell us what is the easy part and then what gets hard and then what's very hard? Can you point to it so we can see?

#21C: Easy part is [to] fill the...on the lines.

Q: Show us where?

#21C: [Moves finger over image] Filling, just filling the...you know, like and then...Ours is different. First filling all line and then shading.

Q: Shading.

#21C: Most difficult part is lines and opening eye.

Q: By opening eye, you mean the eye of the Buddha right there?

#21C: Yeah, painting eyes [points to eye of Buddha]. And the lines are, you know, you cannot do like this [gestures off camera]. You have to go all one.

Q: Oh, one stroke!

00:43:48

#21C: If you miss something, then already damaged. Then you have to do again, you know. That's why this is...that's why I said here Western art and Tibetan is different. Here they bring the shade prints. Also they, you can look from far away. It looks better. Ours you can see closely; then you can see more detail.

Q: Yes, you see the detail closer. So that's why...

#21C: Gold...also we call the *seri*, golden design. Ornaments.

Q: Oh, it's like the...you mean the dress, the robe?

#21C: Yeah, this is also you have to do sort of free hand, you know. Not first...not pencil, just directly from design, from brush and gold.

Q: So the hardest part is opening of the eye. Is that what it's called?

#21C: Yes.

Q: What does that mean, putting actually in the eye of the Buddha? Drawing it?

#21C: Yes, but those eyes line, we call the *jen* and *je*, making lines to bring the eyes open. There's the pupil, the pupil, those things if you [make] little bit mistake that is... most we say the eyes and face is most important.

Q: If you really go close to the eye, very, very close you can see...oh, yeah, that's very delicate.

#21C: And I don't know [how] to say, now those things it really takes time. In Tibet it's really rare now, really who does correctly and also here when I came here, I seeing some practitioners, most practitioners bring me *thangka*, ask me, "What do you think?" There's lot of fake *thangka*. So sad!

00:45:53

Proportion and little bit you know thin and fat, little bit is okay but some of them completely mistake. We have three *kayas* 'dimensions of enlightened beings:' *sambogakaya*, *nirmanakaya*, *dharmakaya*. Those three big different like...*dharmakaya* deity has no robe. [For] some of them, they [painters] put the robe. Some *sambogakaya* [have] 13 ornaments, they put completely no 13 ornaments.

Q: In the...?

#21C: In the deities, *thangkas*.

Q: In the deities.

#21C: And some...[speaks in Tibetan but not discernible].

[Interpreter to interviewee]: *Nirmanakaya*.

#21C: *Nirmana*...they put the *sambhogakaya* ornaments for that. They are so...then one day when I was demonstrating painting on the art market here and one guy bring a camera. He showed me one picture of *thangka*. He said, “What do you think [of] this *thangka*? 13th century or something?” He said. I said, “That’s a fake.” Because I don’t want to make him sad—how to say—but this is my responsibility to tell the truth which is [because] I’m an artist here; I’m trying to preserve our culture. And then it’s difficult for me [laughs] but he’s little sad. He said, “You don’t know nothing about this.” I said, “Okay, it’s all right.” [Laughs]

Q: You did your best...

#21C: Yeah, I did my best.

Q: ...to tell the truth.

#21C: Some of my friends also bought one *thangka*. Then he showed me...completely wrong. Like one *thangka* we call the Tsongkhapa Lama’s *thangka*. Tsongkhapa Lama’s *mudra* ‘hand gesture’ has to be like this [joins thumb and forefinger]. This is *chokhorgya*. This is teaching *mudra*, right?

Q: Yes.

00:47:48

#21C: They did like this hand [shows palms to camera]. This is we call the...in my monastery we do this *mudra* for the effigy [meaning] “take me with you.”. [Laughs] Effigy *mudra*. So sad! One friend bought five *thangkas* from some practitioner himself. Then he asked me. I said, “Those are completely wrong.” I explained one by one. Then he said, “I don’t want these. Do something.” I said, “I want to keep this. I want to show my students.”

Even they [students] cannot learn. Most of them are practitioners, you know. Even they cannot learn painting but they can learn how to get perfect objects for meditation objects. I keep those. I still have [them]. I said I keep those but I can use the brocade— how to say that?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Brocade, the border [frame].

Q: Borders.

#21C: Yeah, in Tibet also [it’s the] same thing. There are a lot of gift shops. You know, they really didn’t paint like this. It costs a lot, of course, you know, spent time. One by one, layer [by] layer. It really takes time. And then there’s a lot of fake *thangka* for the tourists, from Nepal, from China or I don’t know where, mostly from Nepal. So bad! Then tourists they just see.

Some [of] my friends showed me also recently one mandala. Mandala they...just square and round. Then they put completely wrong. In our mandala, each line, each circle everything is different. Deities [are] different in mandala: different design, different symbols, different syllables; all those off. So sad!

Q: Oh, yes. How could people recognize whether some...?

#21C: That's why I'm trying to do painting class. If someone learn painting, it is good. Even if you cannot learn, still they can [understand as] I'm teaching them what is which, you know. About line, stupa, mandala and deities.

Q: Yes, you're trying to teach it.

#21C: Someone said, "This is just art. You're not using for meditating object." I think it's fine. You can [consider it to] be just art. It can be anything but everything has to be correct [as] in the books. Everything [that's] said in the book you have to be correct.

Q: I see. So you really for those two years, one whole year just for drawing so you can draw a perfect...So that perfect circle around the Buddha's head and around the Buddha's body, do you have to do that by hand?

#21C: Yeah, we can do...now these days you can use that—how to say—compass.

Q: The compass.

#21C: Compass. But that time when I was a kid you cannot. I don't have a compass. I have to do with hand. [Laughs]

Q: You had to do by hand.

#21C: Yes, if you learn, [it's] not that difficult. First also when starting we have to use proportion.

Q: Right.

#21C: Yeah and then you practice with that. When you learn [for] years, then you don't need...even dot, I can make dot exactly the same.

Q: The eye and the mind are trained.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: I see. That's wonderful. So to hear about the story, you came back and found your father had died and so you...what happened to you at that point? Were you shocked?

00:51:34

#21C: It's really shock[ing]. Then I cried, cried but just crying.

Q: You cried. Of course, you were so sad.

#21C: Of course, he had hard time because he didn't see me. I'm the youngest kid.

Q: But do you think your father would have been proud of you?

#21C: I think so. He sent some letters when he was alive, you know, [when I was] in east Tibet.

Q: Yeah, I think that meant a lot to him that you studied, and then what happened when you came back to your village?

#21C: I'd already entered my monastery. Then I came back to the monastery I studied all the monastic...

[Interpreter to interviewee]: ...ceremony.

#21C: ...ceremony, everything I learned.

Q: Right in your area?

#21: In the monastery.

Q: In the monastery, in your town?

#21C: Uh...

Q: So the Chinese were letting you at that time to become a monk?

#21C: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you have to get permission?

#21C: Yes.

Q: From whom?

#21C: From the government, the Chinese.

Q: The government. What's the process like?

#21C: That process is not that difficult at that time. It's easy.

Q: At that time, okay.

#21C: And then I get opportunity to go [to] Italy.

Q: How?

00:52:51

#21C: Some institute invited me to teach Tibetan *thangka* painting, and then I have to go get a passport. That time it's so hard. There's like...here you can go just to the post office, fill the form, take picture. That's all, right? Over there you have to go, I think first permission from the monastery, of course. And then village called *dongtso*, then from *shang* and then *shen*, then *tron*, then from Lhasa. Six...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: County, district, then state and the federal.

#21C: I think when I make the passport I've been more than 15 times.

Q: Oh, my goodness!

#21C: Like if I go all like this—how to say...[Speaks in Tibetan] in serial order...

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Procedure.

#21C: ...procedure, then when I get up [to the top office] they said, "Go down." Then I try to ask from bottom—how to say—when started from the bottom then they said, "Start from the...." They said, "We cannot give permission." Like that [speaks in Tibetan] pushed back and forth.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Always they kind of like blame each other.

#21C: I realize I'm the only [one] who has more time because that time I only think about that. Some other people don't have the time.

Q: Exactly.

00:54:19

#21C: Also we have to go travel, that time travel...we don't have a car, own car. You have to hitchhike. [It's] really hard. Then finally I go from bottom [and] they said, "You have to go ask the top." If I go [approach the] top they say, "You have to come all..."

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Step by step.

#21C: ...step by step. One day I said, "Tell me the reason. I don't have time that much. Also I'm not rich people. I cannot pay this much for my travel. Tell the truth. I want an answer. If you cannot give permission tell the truth. I want to answer who invite me, the institute." Then they said, "No reason, No reason." "Why you're not giving?" Then, "You have to come from there." I told him, "If I go down there they said, 'You start from [top].' You said you cannot give permission." Then he said...then finally I asked him really how

late and they said, “Okay, go. I’ll call him.” Finally I got it. I think I did it more than 15 times.

Q: Oh, my goodness!

[Interpreter to interviewer: Just to get a passport.

#21C: Lot of people losing their opportunity like that.

Q: Yeah because they can’t. It’s so long of a process. How long did it take? About a month, a year or what would you say?

#21C: I did it a year.

Q: It took a year to get permission?

#21C: Yeah, to get a passport.

Q: It took one year.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Oh, my goodness! So who invited you?

00:55:52

#21C: One institute in Italy.

Q: In Italy.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: How did they know about you?

#21C: One of their directors came to Tibet. Then they see my skill. Then he asked me.

Q: Invited you to go and what did they...? What did you do when you went to Italy? Can you say what?

#21C: I taught.

Q: You taught?

#21C: I taught Tibetan painting and I taught middle school how to make Tibetan mask.

Q: Um...

#21C: And I learned little bit English and Italian.

Q: Interesting. Did you do any *thangka* painting while you were there?

#21C: Yes, I did *thangka* painting and lot of statues, too.

Q: And statues. You made...you're a sculptor too?

#21C: Yeah, sculpture with clay.

Q: With clay?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: And where did you learn that?

#21C: You know, basic is our...I didn't learn really sculpture but drawing and proportion is very important. Then I have to learn in the monastery how to make the *tormas* 'ritual offerings made of dough.' And then if you know proportion, and then [it's] not that hard. I didn't learn really specifically sculpture.

Q: Just for people who don't know. Tell them what is a *torma* is.

#21C: *Torma* is offering for the deities like [in the] monasteries.

Q: So what do they look like?

00:57:21

#21C: Lot of different shapes. First [created] like with barley [flour] and then ornaments with butter, different colored butter.

Q: They're beautiful.

#21C: Yeah, they're beautiful.

Q: They're beautiful and they are very elaborate, different shapes with butter.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: That are made with butter and sculpted and painted. And so did you work on any frescos or anything in Italy? Did you do any work there restoration of any of that one?

#21C: No, I didn't do there. I did study...learn little bit. That's why my friend they organize for me to study restoration here. That's why my teacher's from America. That's why I came here to study restoration.

Q: So that's good. You came to America to study restoration. What city did you go to in Italy?

#21C: I went to Rome.

Q: To Rome.

#21C: Rome and Florence.

Q: And Florence.

#21C: Florence, yeah.

Q: What was it like for you to see Florence and Rome?

#21C: It's amazing! Michael...I can't say.

Q: Michael Angelo?

#21C: Michael Angelo's painting. I really like his...

Q: Did you like Michael Angelo's work?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: He was a good *thangka* painter?

00:58:46

#21C: His...really painting...I like the color.

Q: What were some of your favorite as a Tibetan artist? Which paintings moved you the most that Michael Angelo did?

#21C: It's the like, Christian deity like Jesus, those things; Madonna or...

Q: Madonna.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Did you see the Sistine Chapel, the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican? The paintings on the ceiling?

#21C: Yeah, I saw those. I bought a lot of his books, too.

Q: You bought a lot of his works? So you like Michael Angelo. Were there any other artist and Italian...?

#21C: I don't know I saw a lot of different [works] but that time I don't know much the language.

Q: Yeah, it's hard. That's wonderful! How long were you in Italy?

#21C: I was there almost two years.

Q: Almost two years?

#21C: Yes.

Q: Then you really got beautiful exposure...

#21C: Yeah.

Q: ...to Western art, enjoying the great painters and fresco painters too in Italy. What did you bring back with you when you went back to Tibet? What did you take with you in your mind or heart?

01:00:00

#21C: One thing I brought is like in Tibet, Chinese destroyed monasteries and all the 700 or 600-year [old] mural paintings. They destroyed, you know and then some were still left there. And then they do restoration. If for example, this is a temple, if one corner is damaged, rest of them all [fine] but still Chinese destroyed already, no? We are also still destroying. They don't want restoration correctly and instead of restoration on the corner, they destroy completely. Then build completely new. That's really sad to me. Also when I was there I didn't know the value how ancient...how to say that—I learned those from Italy. There are how [to] keep their antique.

Q: The antique, the original.

#21C: Yeah, original. In Tibet they destroyed completely, but still there are temples and mural paintings only, you know. Inside the statues precious things are completely gone. Still there are some mural paintings in my monastery. Lots of monasteries they did [this]. When they get permission to rebuild, they destroyed completely [and] rebuilt completely new. Damage was only the corner. Then that's why I taught a lot of my friends, "Don't do that" and how they keep in Italy. And when I come to America I learned those a lot. I taught them how important to restoration...

Q: Restoration.

#21C: ...how to keep those, how value. Even I taught...[Speaks in Tibetan] How to say? In Chinese it's called *rignuju*. There's Chinese office called *rignuju* that takes care of cultural protection.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: I think it's cultural protection.

Q: Cultural protection.

01:02:05

#21C: I know my county's guy. I told him about that...their responsibilities, you know to tell. The Chinese already gave permission.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Archeological Department

Q: So if there's a little destruction don't destroy the whole building and start over. Better keep that precious corner and build from it.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: And keep it there because it's a precious historical artwork. So you learned in Italy. They don't tear buildings down if it's a little damaged. They protect it.

#21C: And also I see...I studied really bit hard from when I was 14 years old, you know until now but still I cannot...[Speaks in Tibetan] What's *dendhamaypa* 'unrivaled' called?

Perfect like someone's really good old one. That's really special. My whole life I spent with that but still not perfect. That's why those old ones are really special to me. In my monastery we do have really old murals still.

Q: Do you?

#21C: During the founder—how to say—when they built the monastery, since that it's 400 years old.

Q: Four hundred years old.

#21C: Still very good. That's why so special.

Q: So even with all your training you couldn't begin to do what they did. So that's why you want to preserve it.

#21C: Yeah. That's why it's so important.

Q: Were you able to get permission to work and preserve it?

#21C: In Tibet?

Q: Yeah.

01:04:00

#21C: Those things I can, we can, yeah.

Q: You think so?

#21C: Problem is if you work hard like spend time, you can but now it's most economic competition. That's why [for] those things no one can pay. That's why we're losing. Competition like these days, Chinese pass some certain money for the village people to build house and rest of them you have to pay. And then [the people] have to build new house. Then this is sort of a competition. Then they hurry with that. If you spent time for like this kind, they cannot make money. That's why they have to do another job. That's why no one's really interested learning time with those things.

Q: Right, right, yeah. It's...

#21C: Like this is...I don't know. They're really...they're...trick or I don't know. They're one way; they're conditioned with the building house, new house. One way, they're also buying car. We can...government [will] pay this much for you to buy new car. You have to buy...pay rest of them, sort of big competition.

Q: Big competition for the arts and just normal things like houses or cars. So money might be available that's what you're saying from the Chinese Government.

#21C: Yeah, this is sort of influence from that. That's why they don't really interested. Not everyone but some, most of them busy with that.

Q: We're talking about most of them being Tibetans living in their areas.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: What about Lhasa? Can the Tibetan Government in Lhasa, whatever is left of it, can it or even in exile, can they supply any money for restoration?

01:06:08

#21C: From outside? It's difficult to send money. It's difficult to send money.

Q: It's difficult to send money into Tibet for restoration?

#21C: Yeah.

Q: The money that the Chinese Government would give...

#21C: Any help from out of country now-a-days, they're always checking. My friend said recently. You can't. I sent some. I also tried to...I did open a small art school, but kids, people not really interested.

Q: Can't make money on it.

#21C: Yeah, I cannot pay for the students, you know. I can pay for the teacher.

Q: Yeah.

#21C: That's why...they're busy. Also when I was there average regular people payment is 15 yuan. These days it's 50, jumped big. That's why it's a big difference. They're so...I don't know [if] this is their trick or they're making them competition [in] building houses or...

Q: So they're...

#21C: They're busy with that; they're not thinking of culture and country and...

Q: Yes.

#21C: They're busy with...

Q: Their money's going on everyday practical things and not to saving the culture and the art. Is that right? Is the money coming from the Chinese Government to help?

#21C: Yes, that's why they pay, "This much I can pay. Rest of them you have to pay. You have to work hard."

Q: Even if people...?

01:07:42

#21C: Then they want that money because if you don't do they're...they don't get money, right?

Q: Right.

#21C: ...help from the government.

Q: You have to do it.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: You have to like build...

#21C: They spend money really that too...

Q: Very hard.

#21C: They get a lot of money. Some reason, you know. Some people [of] certain old age they get some money, for school education. Lot of money I heard. But I don't know really our—how to say—thinking of culture and country.

Q: Yes. I think it's a hard choice for many people. They like their culture but they want their house; they want a car and the young man needs a job. If he becomes a *thangka* painter he can't make as much money.

#21C: Yeah, also some things are true. Like myself, since I've been here I always keep my survival with my painting until now. I didn't do any other thing. I'm surviving with this. Lots of [people] like me, like Tashi [interpreter] too, they studied [in] very good school.

Q: Yes.

#21C: They learn very well whole [or] half of their life and then when they get here, you have to do completely new job, survive.

Q: Another kind of income.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: So you lose...

01:09:07

#21C: Like Tashi, he learned from...graduate from Varanasi. Now he's doing here, helping someone out. Like that. I like...so far so good, myself is so lucky. I stay...survive with that. That's why I'm always telling; "You use your culture with what you like then more stable." Not only one day party and one day gathering and that's culture...sort of preservation. I don't see that. That's one day only; just do, demonstrate.

Q: You want to be part...

#21C: This country is so nice. Really, you can do. It's hard first time but you can do, you know.

Q: You want people to really work on saving their culture.

#21C: Yeah, culture and survive. You can do it. So far, so good myself. I keep my culture and survive, you know.

Q: Yes. Do you go back...when you're back in Tibet in your village or in the monastery and their art, surviving frescos, paintings, do you know how to restore them now?

#21C: Yes.

Q: How did you learn that?

#21C: That's why I came here to study restoration.

Q: So after...

#21C: I know my basic drawing Tibetan. Then I came here to [study] how to mix color; how to make all looking...all those things I studied here.

Q: I see. So after you were in Italy for two years teaching and studying the art, then you went back to your village, your monastery and then you came here to America to learn how to restore?

#21C: Yes.

Q: Who taught you that or where did you study that?

#21C: One my teacher, her name is Connie...Silver or something. We got project here in Las Vegas, New Mexico. She got, I mean, then she invite me to help her. I learned from her. In Las Vegas there's a ranch, Native American style mural painting, watercolor, exactly what we use. We worked for them. I learned from them.

Q: Did you?

01:11:28

#21C: I only need to learn how to mix color; how to do, you know, their style because I already learned our basic painting.

Q: Basic painting, just the mix. So can you take what you are learning here and take it back and try to preserve some of the mural?

#21C: Yes, that I did.

Q: You did.

#21C: And I taught that there...I also taught a lot of leaders of monasteries how important to preserve instead of destroying more and then build completely new. I told them how to do, how valuable. I did that but then I had to leave. One problem...unfortunately I had to leave.

Q: Unfortunately you had to leave and go back.

#21C: No, to come to the United States.

Q: I see. So there's no easy way to save the paintings in a lot of the monasteries. People have to be trained, right? You can't just... Is there any way you can put a temporary protection on a lot of the murals in the monasteries?

#21C: Yeah, one thing is if there's left some mural painting, if they cannot do correct restoration, better leave it the way it is.

Q: The way it is.

#21C: In my monastery, our master invited one painter, [an] old guy but he's not good. And then he tried restoration. We don't need complete change but he doesn't know how to do restoration. I'm better than him but I'm much younger than him. Our master is not a *thangka* painter. He's a good artist but not a painter. That's why he only believes age. He

didn't know any painting. Then he didn't let me touch the restoration on the 400-year old mural paintings. That guy doesn't know anything.

For example like this *mudra* [gestures off camera], they put thumb here [indicates little finger]. It's completely wrong. Then I'm...he let me put...he put me to do just house painting. Lot of my students they know pretty well that they are so sad. He couldn't listen. He's not Chinese... [Laughs] He didn't listen to me. Then we're so sad. Then I ask him, "Please don't put varnish on it." He didn't listen to me because he only listen our boss, you know, master.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I think what he's trying to say is it's very important to educate the heads of the monasteries to keep the antique value what still exists.

Q: Exactly. It's better to leave it alone than try to fix it unless you're special.

#21C: That guy what he did is [to do] restoration [on a] small hole [where] people throw rock, you know. He didn't have education to do restoration. Then he make...it doesn't match and then he make bigger, bigger [and] change everything. That's so bad.

Q: Oh, that breaks your heart!

#21C: Then I ask him don't put the varnish [but] he did put the varnish. That's why I came here to study restoration. Then my [American] teacher said, "What kind of varnish he put?" There's only [one] big strong varnish [in Tibet], you know. Here, there's a lot of option. It has a name. We only have one varnish that time. I brought some but then first I didn't have any sample.

"What kind of varnish?" I said, "Varnish is varnish." I thought there's only one but there are a hundred different kinds. Then my teacher said, "Bring some piece." I gave her but then I didn't hear anything from her. Anyway, our one...you know, in front of temple there are four dharma kings. He damaged all those. But he didn't believe me. One day our university art professor, he came to visit our monastery and then he told our leader, "Who damaged this?" Then he's so sad. Then he regretted, too late.

Q: He recognized it.

#21C: Yeah.

Q: How many...this might be a hard question to answer but how many people would you say might be living in Tibet who have had at least your level of training or higher?

01:16:26

#21C: That's a good question but I have no ready answer.

Q: You have no idea.

#21C: I have no idea. Really, [it's] very rare.

Q: It's very rare.

#21C: I see in the Bakor 'Square' of Lhasa, Bakor all tourists. Not now but when I was there, tourists. Most good educated *thangka* painters are inside. No one go inside much. Outside there's bright business—how to say—the painters [paintings are] very fake, very bad, all those you can sell very well because [they are] cheap, you know.

Q: So there's no...

#21C: It's very rare [to find] good, educated...

Q: So there's no way that the best educated *thangka* painters could kind of come together and start training other people or something like that under, even under Chinese occupation? Is there any way to...?

#21C: Yeah, they can do. They're still doing. Some project's doing very well.

Q: They are.

#21C: They are using stone color, yeah.

Q: Okay. They are doing that.

#21C: They are doing that but still...

Q: You know, you mentioned something that I think maybe people aren't aware of but it's important for me to realize too. There can be many *thangka* paintings that are maybe a nice work of art but the important thing is to use the *thangka* painting as a meditation, object of meditation of the mind. It must be done to perfection.

#21C: Yes, that's our...

[Interpreter to interviewee]: ...tradition.

Q: Tradition. Can you say a little more about that why the relationship and the design is so important for the mental evolution?

01:18:14

#21C: That's why I am saying ancient time was taught levels all step by step. Finally teacher said, "Now you can paint *thangka*." Until that you cannot paint *thangka* because we say...[Speaks in Tibetan]...

[Interpreter to interviewer] For example, like Buddha. There are 32 different symbols of enlightened persons. So each of every piece, parts of body, proportion, everything symbolizes an enlightened person. So if you change that then it cannot symbolize what you

are drawing, and especially like ornaments and everything, the objects they are holding, every those things have explanation and a reason.

Q: It sounds like when you went to study with your master in Kham you had to spend mornings and nighttime reading the scriptures and understanding the spiritual...?

#21: Yeah, and also especially the deity is...you have to have also monastic training little bit. That two is best. Some artist they know how to draw but they don't know any monastic...everything all meditation objects have to be correct from the book, right?

Q: Right.

#21C: That education only [in the] monastery, mostly. There is some but mostly in the monastery. If you have both of those, then it's correct.

Q: Right, I see. So the most...

#21C: We have two levels, like one is *shingtson* [which] is painting house. That is fine, you can just make beauty, whatever you like, bright you know. This has detail...*Ihadipa* is painting deities. This is higher level.

Q: And it requires certainly some monastic training and understanding of the dharma and the teachings...

#21C: Yeah.

Q: ...of the Buddha for you to really appreciate and understand what all this means.

#21C: Yeah, there's also some things you only learn in the monastery.

Q: Maybe we could end by your giving us if you wouldn't mind an explanation of your painting for people who're just learning about Buddhism or curious. Could you describe what we're looking at in this *thangka* painting? Could...you know, we've a...? We have a picture.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: You are asked to describe the *thangka*.

01:21:06

#21C: Okay. [Points to outer portion of image on *thangka*] The scenery you can make whatever you like, sort of free option or how to say? You can make. But those things like robes [indicates Buddha's robes] this is a *shamthap* 'skirt-like robes of monks,' *zen* 'monk's upper garment,' *choegoe* 'formal monastic robe' those things you cannot change much. For example, you cannot make this [points to robe] green or blue, just maroon. That's saffron.

Q: Saffron.

#21C: Yeah. *Shamthap* and also ...it's a Medicine Buddha. There are eight Medicine Buddha but this is the main Medicine Buddha. It's always blue.

Q: Blue, why?

#21C: I think this is accomplishment. We have four activity and accomplishment... *bindru*, also book says everything. Is *bindru yangdhong lapis lazuli*?

Lapis lazuli color on the book all when you meditate, reading book, changing. You have to...this is map out to how to visualize the deities.

Q: I see. So the color blue represents change.

#21C: Accomplishment.

Q: Accomplishment.

#21C: You know, we have four activity and accomplishment.

Q: Accomplishment. I see. Okay, and what about the... What is the Buddha is holding? What is this?

#21C: [Points to image] A begging bowl and *arura*, king of herbs.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Arura* is a fruit that is used for medicine and they are called the king of medicine. Almost like every medicine *arura* is used.

Q: How do you say it again?

#21C: *Arura*.

Q: *Aru*?

#21C: *Arura*.

Q: *Aruga*?

#21C: *Arura*.

Q: *A-R...*

#21C: *Arura. Arura*.

Q: *A-R-U-ra*.

01:23:10

#21C: And also seated on the lotus and moon disc. This [points to lower part of image] is moon disc. This is always white.

Q: It's always white.

#21C: Yes, if it's wrathful [deity] then it's red and yellow, but peaceful [deity] always white, moon disc and lotus.

Q: Sitting on the lotus. What about the flower?

#21C: This one [points to flower]?

Q: Yeah.

#21C: This is just a flower holding *arura*. Those things you can change whatever like, the flower but *arura* has to be *arura*. Also this *mudra* and *nyamsha...chokjin*. [Speaks in Tibetan] What do you say for *chokjin*?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It's blessing.

#21C: Generosity. Generosity *mudra*.

Q: And the Buddha's...what is this?

#21C: Jewel and...[not discernible]. Those things also he said...

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Symbol of enlightenment.

#21C: [Camera focuses on Buddha's crown] 32 symbols, 32 good signs and 80...How to say...[Speaks in Tibetan] example. Those things you have to have.

Q: So if someone was meditating especially on this Medicine Buddha, part of the meditation comes from actually viewing the painting, viewing the *thangka*.

01:24:46

#21C: Yeah.

Q: Taking it in?

#21C: Yes, I think this is a method. Most, we're saying—how to say—every being has Buddha nature, right?

Q: Yes.

#21C: This is how to get...this is sort of method. Lot of people thought this [points to *thangka*] is our...[Speaks in Tibetan]...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That's only an object to generate your pure vision, visualization in meditation.

#21C: This is a method for us to bring....

Q: It's a method to bring it in.

#21C: ...method to find your Buddha nature. That's why we have to have correct. Then... yeah.

Q: So this beautiful image allows one to try to find one's own nature, Buddha nature within and this facilitates it by being perfect in every way, proportion, color...

#21C: Yeah.

Q: ...and what it represents in the Buddha nature. It's very, very beautiful. Well, I think this is a wonderful place maybe for us to thank you for this interview and we wish you much success in helping preserve the art of the Tibetan people, and especially the Buddha nature in everyone that will see these works. Is there anything that you wanted to say about this interview or your work?

#21C: I think that's it. Hope people can understand my broken English and get what I mean.

Q: What are your hopes for Tibetan art?

#21C: Correctly learning and preserve our culture, whatever you know. One person doesn't need to know everything. Whatever you know keep that.

Q: That's very, very good. You don't have to know everything but what you know keep it.

#21C: Myself try to do this. What I know is only painting. That's why...I'm telling like him. We have lot of people in exile; they [are] educated much more than me. They will do what they know. They survive and preserve. I'm trying to do that, not perfect but hope...[laughs].

Q: Well, we wish you well in your journey and in your life work. Thank you very much for being part of our interview today. Thank you.

#21C: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW